Learningguild Letter

2.2013

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

I write this time in relation to our philosophy seminar of 2013, in which, within the general area of philosophy of religion, we examined and discussed some Christian and other writings. There were Christians and non-Christians among our members, and the question deserves first to be asked what value such examination and discussion (at their best) in such a group, and its counterpart in anyone's own study and reflection, might be hoped to have. Then I shall present and comment on some statements, some from writings we studied, especially Oliver Quick's *Doctrines of the Creed* (1938; republished in the Fontana Library in 1963), on the three themes of sin, atonement, and motivation for Christians and for non-Christians. My aim is to elicit the reaction "That's worth thinking about", not to press any conclusion that I may have reached, and I should welcome others' expression of their thoughts. This is a longer letter than usual because I have wanted to quote a range of statements, include some members' contributions and give proper consideration.

I often use the label 'Millian' in front of 'discussion'. The whole of the 23rd paragraph of Chapter 2 of John Stuart Mill's *Liberty* (it begins "If the intellect and judgement") sets out the nature and much of the value of such discussion. Here are two of his main moves:

> … when we turn to … morals, religion, politics, social relations, and the business of life, three-fourths of the arguments for every disputed opinion consist in dispelling the appearances which favour some opinion different from it. … [One] must be able to hear [counter-arguments] from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them.

There is confusion here between opinions and arguments employed in their defence: better to say 'from persons whose beliefs differ from one's own or one's group's', using 'beliefs' as an apter word than 'opinions' because of its frequent link with 'in' as well as with 'that'.

"This is still too intellectual", it may be replied: "accepting or rejecting some religious belief is not usually a matter of reviewing **arguments**: that's why the noun 'faith' is so often used." The word 'argument' does have a legitimate place, which I had in mind for it when as an undergraduate I used to satirize the attitude I opposed in lines I adapted from Bunyan's:

> There's no encouragement,
> We have no argument:
> In this alone content,
> To be committed.

On the other hand, most philosophers are too fond of the word 'argument', and often it would be better to say not "What is your argument for that?" but, for example, "What **weighs** with you there, and why?" We can hardly hope to understand others (or ourselves?) if we don't ask such a question. Millian discussion is very precious if it encourages people to ask the question of others and themselves, and preferably to read widely. We can, for example, read the Jew Martin Buber (in *Two Types of Faith*) concerning what emerges for him from the synoptic gospels' presentations of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth.[1]

Such study and discussion is seldom found. Why is that? Part of the explanation is that it is not the fashion. I have been reading Shirley Guthrie's well-known text *Christian Doctrine* (the revised edition of 1994) and, on the recommendation of Professor Chris Mostert, one of our seminar members, Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding* (revised edition 2004) and find that in these books both men are content to explain Christian theology with no reference to particular people who have given reasons for rejecting it. Their dominant questions are, in effect, "What do we Christians be-

lieve?" or "What should we Christians believe?" rather than "What have people of different beliefs written about this matter, and which view is the most defensible?" It would make a difference to theological colleges (and church-linked residential colleges, and tertiary education generally) if that third question were widely asked.

But the explanation has to be a wider one, and more intimate. Most serious Christian or other religious discipleship combines help to others with gratitude for examples that have influenced one's life, loyalty, a regular routine of public worship and private prayer, and belief in "eternal life". Actively to consider a radical change of outlook is hard indeed to add to that combination. Doing so may well appear too disturbing to persist with. Consider this sentence from John Baillie's excellent memoir of his brother and fellow-theologian Donald:

> But one thing was always clear to him — that without God and Christ human life was without significance of any kind, devoid of all interest.[2]

On that view, only despair would be reasonable for non-Christians. *Reductio ad absurdum?*

As this letter illustrates, I continue to be much concerned with Christian literature. I do not find it easy to be an outsider, having been an insider until 1971, the year in which I turned 36. My loyalty, however, is to the quest of seeking what I can reasonably believe to be true; and a large part of the "significance" and wonder of human life is that we can do that, and help our fellows, becoming acquainted with more than one perspective and seeking to learn from and be fair to each.

1

I invite the reader to consider how he or she is to respond to these statements in Quick's discussion of sin (Ch. XX, Sec. 2):

> … selfishness is sin. … Man, because he is so self-conscious, can never be just natural. He must either rise to the unselfishness which is supernatural, or else sink into an artificiality, a hypocrisy or a self-indulgence, of which nature at least is innocent.

How much better to talk about men and women, or human beings, than to use the word 'man' in that way. Then one may be less inclined to such generalizations. T.H.Green, with characteristic realism, drew attention both to the crucial human capacity for caring unselfishly for the well-being of one's group and to the fact that such a group had sometimes to be very small:

> There are circumstances in which it cannot present itself to the individual as anything else than the work of keeping a family comfortably alive ….[3]

Such a person, devoted to the welfare of his or her family, ought not to be regarded as fundamentally a sinner.

Writing about the Oxford philosopher William Kneale, Timothy Smiley says in a memoir of him to which we shall return:

> He was brought up as a Methodist, but … remained — rather regretfully — a sympathetic agnostic all his adult life. … He was sober in every sense of the word, scholarly, concerned to get it right, with a fairly old-fashioned conscience and entirely devoid of any kind of affectation. He had no foibles or oddities, but in private as in public was a kind, generous, calm, straightforward man.[4]

Don't these two quotations give us grounds for rejecting such a view as Quick's?

In John Baillie's once well-known book, still deserving of study, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (1942), the theme of sin is prominent. He writes of

> the dreadful tangle of dishonesty and lying self-deception and pathetic make-believe with which we all the time surround ourselves
>
> (p.20)

and of

> [the] infinitely regressive character of sin. I no sooner become aware of my pride than I become proud of being aware of it; and then if I reproach myself for this second sin, I go on at once to commit a third — I become proud of being aware of being aware of it.
>
> (p.60)

Such generalizations ring hollow if one has met women or men with characters like those of whom Green and Smiley have written as above.

Guthrie, in his discussion of sin in Ch. 11, says (p.213):

> Contrary to the impression we are sometimes given, sin is not the main theme and central emphasis of the Christian faith.

Yet he himself keeps quoting from William Faulkner the sentences "You ain't *got* to. You can't help it" (pp.221-7) and stays within the Reformed catechetical tradition by writing:

> "total depravity" means that we are *not* free whole-heartedly, without reservation or qualification, to love and let ourselves be loved by God and the people with whom we live. In this sense, good and bad people alike, Christians and non-Christians, we are "slaves to sin" — slaves trapped by the anxiety, division within ourselves, and self-contradictions that result from the twisted relationships in which we all live. This is a trap from which we cannot free ourselves, no matter how hard we try.
>
> (p.226)

In contrast, I want to say that some men and some women are characterized by both integrity and integration: they are characteristically "kind, generous, calm, straightforward". Duncan Reid made the good point in our seminar that some of the most loving people are particularly conscious of their sinfulness. I would prefer to stress how vital it is for us all to be vividly aware of ways in which we have behaved and/or might behave selfishly or unwisely: as the Authorized Version has Paul say (1 Corinthians 10.12), "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".

2

Kneale, writes Smiley, "could never accept the doctrine of atonement".[5] How does Quick sum up that doctrine? In our seminar I invited attention to this sentence, following the phrase "the truth of God's love":

> The Christian gospel presents, as evidence of the truth, the fact that by a supreme act of love God in Christ has put himself at man's side to suffer with him and for him in his sinful condition, and so to win from him the free response of penitence which is the first condition of salvation through forgiveness.
>
> (p.213)

Chris Mostert agreed that it was a good summary statement, but proposed that we link with it the next sentence:

> By that same act God in man, and man in God, has vanquished the powers of evil and exalted human nature to God's throne by the complete self-sacrifice.

In response to Milan Rados's objection that the powers of evil have obviously not been vanquished, Chris used the analogy from Oscar Cullman that the achievement represented by the doctrine of the atonement was like that of D-Day in 1944: the crucial breakthrough had been made, and eventual victory assured.[6] That belief is what Christian theologians call an eschatological one, concerned with what will ultimately be made real. If we hold it, we may be asked how we can do so in the face of, say, on the one hand, maternal and infant mortality, and earthquakes and eruptions such as at Pompeii, and tsunamis, and, on the other, such genocide as was perpetrated at Auschwitz.

What are we to make of Quick's words "the fact that by a supreme act of love God in Christ has put himself at man's side"? We can certainly link it with a very influential remark of Paul's: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5.19). Quick uses the locutions 'Christ' and 'Jesus Christ' and 'our Lord' more than 'Jesus', whereas for Buber it is always 'Jesus'. If we are to talk of evidence (and why not?), it must be presented in a way that does not beg the question, and Quick does beg it from his use of the word 'fact' on. Perhaps for most sincere orthodox Christians it is not a matter of evidence but of being moved by the kind of juxtaposition that Dorothy L. Sayers puts into the mouth of Balthazar, the third Wise Man:

> Fear is our daily companion — the fear of want, the fear of war, the fear of cruel death, and of still more cruel life. But all this we could bear if we knew that we did not suffer in vain; that God was beside us in the struggle, sharing the miseries of His own world.[7]

Is there a coherent interpretation of Paul's words, and of those Quick uses, 'God in Christ' and 'God in man, and man in God'? The New Testament writers, with some exception in the gospel of John, so different from the other three, mostly stayed fairly close to the talk about Jesus attributed to Peter in Acts 2: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man … God raised him up … God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified". Even in John, there is a consistent theme of Jesus as sent by the one he called Father. The loving purpose (*prothesis*, *eudokia*) of God has been fulfilled in him, they would say

(see Ephesians 1.5,9,11 and 3.11). The appellations 'Lord' (*kurios*), which conveyed the ideas of one deserving obedience, and '*Christos*', used to put into Greek the Hebrew '*Messiah*' with its meaning of 'the anointed one', were far from suggesting that you could call Jesus himself God. Indeed, though he appears to have called himself "son of man", perhaps implying that he was not to be exalted, the early Christians called him "son of God", and said that he was seated at the right hand of God (see, for one example, Romans 8.34), with no suggestion that you could say of him that he was both God and man. Yet orthodox Christianity has said just that, with its doctrine of a Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How difficult it is to make any sense of that comes out in Guthrie's book. On the one hand he says (Ch. 12, p.240);

> Physically *and* intellectually *and* emotionally *and* spiritually, Jesus lived the same life we all live. He hurt. He played and went to parties. He had to learn. He could be afraid as well as self-confident. He could feel lonely and abandoned by God and his friends. He was one of us — a human being.

But at the end of the same chapter he says (p.246f) of "the story of the Son of God" that "It is the story of a *God* who becomes little, weak and powerless" and then, on the last page (p.248):

> God is the God who comes to us in the man Jesus …. *How* it is that in this one person we meet both an authentic human being and "God, the Father Almighty" the church has never been able to explain. … He is at once true human being and true God – God-with-*us* and *God*-with-us.

The word 'meet', there ambiguous, certainly needs explanation, and it would have been better to say that he is said to have been **given the name** 'Immanuel', which in English becomes 'God-is-with-us' (Matthew 1.23; cf. Isaiah 7.14). I would wish such explanation to be given in connection with sympathetic but non-Christian views of Jesus, such as that of Buber (see my analysis of Chs X and XI). But I have not found non-Christian accounts of Jesus mentioned by Quick or Guthrie or Migliore, let alone discussed.

What are we to think of Quick's emphasis on "the free response of penitence which is the first condition of salvation through forgiveness"? That theme is certainly central to Christianity: consider the parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32) and of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer (18.9-14). We can and should recognize the defects of complacency and lack of sympathy in the elder brother and the Pharisee; but ought we to see penitence and the concomitant desire for forgiveness as the recurring disposition of any honest person?

There is an unresolved tension between two strands in Christian thought, evidenced in the two hymns that begin "Just as I am", the second presumably written partly as a counter to the first. In the third verse of 497 in the Australian Hymn Book is the line "Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind", and in the last of 527 the two lines "Just as I am, young, strong and free | to be the best that I can be".

One of my tutors in philosophy at Christ Church, Oxford, was Michael Foster. He was a deeply Christian and hospitable man, but suffered from depression and in the first week of the first term of the 1959-60 year took his own life. A friend of his, David Edwards, wrote about this suicide and that of a bishop, in an article called "The Twentieth Century Sickness", in *Frontier* (Spring 1960). That sickness, he said, was "despair because of mental illness". As well as calling for recognition of the need in many cases for "technical psychiatric treatment", Edwards has these sentences (p.40):

> There must in truth be a painful turning to the Holy God — a turning regularly renewed. But a conviction is growing in the writer that many Christians today need not so much penitence as courage; not so much exhortation as forgiveness, comfort and assurance; not so much a deepening or a spread of the moral sense as a liberation of the creative instincts; not so much self-examination as self-acceptance. Many Christians, too, need not more fellowship within the Church but more delight in using their skills in the tasks and recreations of the world.

I would say, thinking of both children and adults, "Our fundamental need is less often penitence than delight in love, cooperation and creativity." Not enough is heard in church (or in schools?) about "**all** the blessings of this life" and how to deepen and foster them, and, one might add, so to delight in them that one has a strong defence against any temptation to try drugs.

A hundred years before Edwards's article Mill criticized "Christian morality (so called)", saying "Its ideal is negative rather than positive", and "on the Calvinistic theory … the one great offence of man is self-will. All the good of which humanity is

capable is comprised in obedience." (Those quotations from *On Liberty* are respectively from Ch. 2, para. 37, and Ch. 3, para. 7; they are best digested in their contexts.) Jesus himself, to judge from Luke's gospel taken as a whole, had as his main theme (unrealistically?) the imminence of what he called "the kingdom of God": see a concordance such as Young's. But in that context he invited his followers to an outgoing generosity of spirit and uninhibited practical service (6.27-38).

I know that Anselm offers the reproach and warning "*nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum*" ("you have not yet considered how immense is the weight of sin"), and like Plato I am well aware of the prevalence of injustice — and of inadequate motives for outwardly just behaviour.[8] I do not accept that two dispositions of vital importance are, first, belief that God is uniquely revealed in Jesus called Christ, and especially in his death and resurrection, and, second, a related penitent recognition of one's own sinfulness.

3

A matter we turned to near the end of the year was the motivation for one's actions. I invited study of some advice given in 1887 by Francis Paget (then Dean of Christ Church, later Bishop of Oxford) to a former pupil who was a priest in a slum area of London. Yes, he says, one can point out to "a Secularist, disbelieving Christianity" that it has been "a great power of beneficence", but

> these effects are essentially due to something beyond the moral & social conceptions which may be admired in Christianity:— that they are wrought by a power resting on historic and supernatural facts and drawn from a supernatural Source:— that they can never be secured or sustained apart from the Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, ascended, ever-living Christ, the Son of God.[9]

We also considered the fourth verse from a hymn of Isaac Watts (the third begins "O mighty God"):

> From Thee, the ever flowing spring,
> Our souls shall drink a fresh supply;
> While such as trust their native strength
> Shall melt away, and droop, and die.[10]

We all of us die, one might begin one's reply. The question is whether without faith and trust in God (or even, as Paget might insist, without specifically Christian faith) an orientation towards lifelong loving and devoted self-giving can be long sustained.

The long passage in Hebrews 11 recalling the endurance through faith (*dia pisteōs*) of heroic Jews makes Paget's claim impossible to sustain. Thinking not only now with Mill (*Liberty* Ch. 2, paras 17-19) of the mass of past persecution by Christians, but also of sexual abuse of children by clergy, and the related failure of a system of authority itself liable to cause priority to be given to institutional maintenance, Christians may not find it so difficult as in past years to recognize with John Hick that

> we are not in a position to assert a greater power in Christianity than in any of the other great world faiths to bring about the kind of transformation in human beings that we all desire.[11]

Is faith and trust **in God** necessary, or at least hard to do without? That is a more difficult question. Certainly, many people have found the inspiration for a self-giving life within a religious tradition. Such a tradition can certainly "make a very great difference". The words are those of G.J.Warnock, not himself a Christian, in Ch. 8, section C, of *The Object of Morality* (1971). He sees the difference as lying in the recognition that to God the believer owes "veneration … love and fear, and above all … *obedience*". Davis McCaughey called a book of his *Christian Obedience in the University*. Obedience is not always the cramping theme that Mill thought it to be. There is also the response of gratitude for what is believed to be the grace and mercy of God, seen as prompting the comforting of others (2 Corinthians 1.3f).

John Baillie addressed himself particularly in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* to those whose heritage was or included Christianity but were no longer believers or churchgoers. He invited them (p.126f) to see themselves as "the Uprooted Ones, *les déracinés*", and "the Men of the Afterglow", taking that last word from D.S.Cairns. Writing in 1941, he concluded (p.127f) that

> our ideal standards, fine as they may be in themselves, are likely to succumb before the pressure to which they are now being subjected, unless they drink again at the fountain from which they drew their life; and … in particular, any merely individualistic version of them is likely to be powerless against the forceful appeal of totalitarian community spirit. Our only hope lies in finding another and nobler form of community … a community which is universal,

> and there is only one such community — that Body mystical, the Church of Christ.

But anyone who impartially surveys that "community" has grounds for regarding it as a collection of "communities", divided from each other and often themselves divided (as the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are, largely without open discussion of differences), whose divisions and some of whose doctrines and practices over the years have caused great suffering. These bodies have, on the whole, not engendered sufficient respect, welcome and outreach towards those who are not Christian or even not of their denomination.

Here and now in Australia, as elsewhere, there is need of a kind of fellowship that is not based on Christianity, but on ideals of mutual respect and responsive cooperation, whatever beliefs or lack of them may characterize the participants.[12]

It may be replied "You are imagining the impossible – that people lift themselves by their own bootstraps. Without recognition of their own sinfulness, and reliance on the grace of God, they will be proud of their own supposed progress, and soon in conflict with one another."

Donald Baillie puts such a view at the end of a paper of his.

> It is not by careful cultivation of our characters in the light of an ideal that the finest character is actually formed. That purely moralistic method is apt to lead either to manifest failure or, if it seems to be succeeding, to a self-righteous pride, which is really the worst failure of all. … It appears to be true in a very plain and practical sense that a man is not really free to live as he ought to live until he passes beyond a self-contained morality into that relationship which the saints have described as dependence on the grace of God.[13]

'Cultivation', 'moralistic' and 'self-contained' are expressions that suggest a kind of priggishness and solitariness very different from the disposition Smiley attributed to Kneale. T.H.Green presents as the supreme good "the settled disposition on each man's part to make the most and best of humanity in his own person and in the persons of others".[14] We can modify that to avoid any suggestion, such as Green certainly did not intend, that women are excluded by saying "on the part of each human being" and "his or her own person". Provided that others' freedom to choose is always respected, that phrase, or Green's following shorter one "self-devotion to an ideal of mutual service", is an excellent guide to life, and can be implemented in most situations. Is it true that no religion provides a better overall guide?

But what, it may be asked, is the motivation for such a style of life? Experience of some of the great goods of human life and of the enhancement of those which are individual, such as intellectual and practical skills, sensitivities and crafts, by their being shared with others and exercised for mutual benefit. To see some of these goods evidenced in others' lives can be a converting experience, just as a student of mine from a conventional Afrikaner family told me in 1975 that it had been converting for him to read Chapter 3 of Mill's *Liberty* on the development of one's individual powers for good. To know oneself to be valued, appreciated and even loved by others can melt the coldness of outlook that often prevents people from making the best of being in others' company. Schools and universities in which the focus is primarily on individual success in imminent tasks cannot contribute much to any sense of shared exploration for the common good.

I repeat the invitation to join in discussion of any of these matters, and to say what considerations weigh with you, and why.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

NOTES

1. My summary and analysis of that book is available, in print and online, as a supplement to *L'g L* 2.2002.
2. From "Donald: a Brother's Impression", in *The Theology of the Sacraments and other papers*, by D.M.Baillie, p.21p.
3. *Prolegomena to Ethics*, sec. 239.
4. *Proceedings of the British Academy: 1994 Lectures and Memoirs*, p.387f.
5. *Ibid.*, p.388.
6. *Christ and Time*, 3rd ed., 1962, pp. 84, 141.
7. From the first play, "Kings in Judaea", in the series *The Man born to be King*.
8. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, Bk 1, 21. For Plato, see especially the Polus part of the *Gorgias* (461-81) and Adeimantus's major contribution (362-7) to the *Republic*.
9. *Francis Paget*, by Stephen Paget and J.M.C.Crum, p.103.
10. "Awake, our souls!", 418 in *The Methodist Hymn-Book* (1933).
11. "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity", in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, p.24.
12. See *L'g L* 2.2005 and its supplement, Sec. 4.
13. "Philosophers and Theologians on the Freedom of the Will", reprinted in the book cited at n.2, p.136f.
14. *Prolegomena to Ethics*, sec. 244.

Conflicting alignments in Melbourne psychiatry

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Spiritual support rendered by religious ministrants and treatment given by doctors both have a long history in the care of the mentally ill. Early on, priests or their counterparts probably handled all illness — physical and mental — using techniques such as prayer, exorcism and plant remedies. Later there was a division of labour: priests attended to the trials and salvation of the soul, while bodily ailments were the prerogative of doctors. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Spain, the demarcation was less clear. Clerics and doctors found sufficient common ground to collaborate in giving empathetic care and active treatment to the mentally disturbed.. For this reason, the Catholic asylums of Valencia, Saragossa, Seville and Madrid are sometimes described as the "cradle of Western psychiatry".

The belief systems of those I have mentioned were incompatible. On the one hand, theologians argued that illnesses of the mind were caused by supernatural forces, including demonic possession. On the other, doctors of the day linked mental illness with excessive activity of the "humours" of the body — e.g. too much stagnant blood or difficult-to-digest food. As neither profession was dominant, it was not unusual for mentally disturbed patients to receive spiritual succour alongside physical therapies such as cupping, bleeding or enemas.

In many colonial countries including Australia, governments of the nineteenth century hedged their bets when it came to providing care for the mentally disturbed. They established asylums under the management of medical staff, but clergy from prominent Christian denominations — Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian — attended patients on a regular basis.

Collaboration between doctors and clerics was frequent in twentieth-century Victorian asylums, but not universal. Where cordial relations existed, asylum staff generally conceded that morale, and emotions such as guilt and jealousy, could not be analysed purely in terms of material things such as neurons and body chemicals. At the same time, the concession by clergy that a range of biological, psychological and social factors had a profound impact on states of mind encouraged mutual understanding.

The Melbourne psychiatrist and therapeutic innovator John Cade recounted a telling example of medical-clerical collaboration in treating mental illness when he recalled the case of a suicidal soldier in the Changi prisoner-of-war camp, Singapore, during the Second World War. The man had become deeply depressed after realising that he had unwittingly been responsible for the death of many of his comrades. The guilt he felt overwhelmed him and Cade sought help for him. "I thought this was a job for the chaplain, who indeed handled it very capably and successfully", Cade said.

During the twentieth century, the numbers of doctors and scientists associated with mental health care increased markedly and the scientific approaches they espoused gave rise to many new and effective therapies to treat mental illness. In the consequent power shift in relations between psychiatrists and less numerous clerics, long-standing ideas about spiritual aspects of mental health came under renewed scrutiny. To the surprise of some, novel alliances within and between religion and psychiatry emerged. At the same time some deeply-held religious and anti-religious sentiments influenced psychiatry, resulting in a polarisation within the profession.

Freud and reactions in Australia

Sigmund Freud's ideas about psychoanalysis filtered into the asylum system in Australia early in the twentieth century. A number of physicians and asylum doctors started to teach and use psychotherapy

as a way of expanding understanding of interior lives and human behaviour.

Dr Morris Gamble, the medical superintendent of the Kew Mental Hospital in Melbourne, suggested as early as 1911 that he found it valuable to use the "therapeutic talk" advocated by Freud in treating patients with temporary forms of mental illness. Describing his understanding of what was involved he referred to "persistent, well-ordered, sympathetic and individual attention by the medical officer, aided by an intelligent and tactful nurse".

Around the same time, Dr John Springthorpe, an asylum reformer and a teacher in the Melbourne Medical School, included a chapter on psychotherapy in his publication, *Therapeutics, Dietetics and Hygiene; An Australian Text-Book* (Melbourne, James Little, 1914). He regarded Freudian psychoanalysis as a systematic and detailed attempt to discover all the significant experiences and psychologically important motives and impulses of individuals from earliest childhood. Psychoanalysis also provided a way to use the information collected to treat disturbed patients. Psychoanalytic ideas gained further ground after the First World War when a group of Australian psychiatrists working in mental hospitals funded by the state used psychoanalysis to treat soldiers debilitated by a condition then described as shell-shock, better known these days as post-traumatic-stress disorder (PTSD).

By the early 1920s, what had seemed unremarkable started to be controversial. Speaking at the Sydney Domain, a Jesuit priest named Henry Cock claimed that psychoanalysis "reeked" of materialism and was in fact "the last dying kick of Materialists". By this he meant that it denied the importance of spiritual values, and especially of free will.

Cock understood materialists to claim that matter alone exists and everything else could be analysed in terms of it. This idea struck at the core of the Catholic belief in God. If the soul was merely a material entity like the body, how could it survive death and decay and enter eternal life, as required by a core principle of Catholicism? And if the soul was material, how did it give rise to individual conscience and moral responsibility?

Freud's own writings led many persons with religious convictions to think that psychiatry portrayed religious belief as the product of some kind of neurosis. This, along with other basic tenets of Freud, caused many believers to have serious reservations, if not suspicions, about psychiatry.

The growing influence of Freudian and psychoanalytic ideas within the broader community left some psychiatrists — particularly, it seems, those of the Catholic faith — in a bind. How could they differentiate themselves from their psychoanalytically-aligned colleagues? The answer, it seems, was to use a certain phrase.

Biological but also Catholic

In the early 1950s, a group of influential Catholic psychiatrists in Melbourne — some of them very senior — started using the phrase 'a Catholic tradition in psychiatry' to denote a psychiatry that was essentially physical or biological. The causes of mental illnesses and handicaps were seen as material things such as infections, toxins, irregularities of body chemicals and genetic malfunctions. Treatments were more likely than not to be of a material or biological nature: medicinal drugs, physical shock and induced fever were all tried on patients, with varying levels of success. All these approaches could be studied by science, and thus the "Catholic tradition in psychiatry" was presented as strongly aligned with science, as well as with a particular set of Catholic beliefs.

In contrast, Freud explained much mental illness in terms of the unconscious mind's harbouring emotions that influence behaviour, with many disorders set in train during childhood. Rightly or wrongly, this concept was seen as strongly associated with an agnostic or atheistic mindset. Freudian psychotherapy was also less amenable to scientific study than the biological approaches and was thus open to the criticism that it was poorly aligned with science.

The Melbourne psychiatrist Dr Eric Seal described the contest of ideas he encountered early in his career in Victoria as follows:

> … when I entered Psychiatry in the early 1950s, I was regarded with some disfavour by many Catholics for being a psychiatrist, and by most psychiatrists for being a Catholic. … Mutual suspicion was engendered on one side by the dogmatic and too often unfeeling authoritarianism of the pre-conciliar Church; and on the other by the equally dogmatic and authoritarian elitism of the more aggressive and omniscient psycho-

> analysts. Indeed, the latter had polarized their medical and psychiatric colleagues as well, and in those days things were still inclined to be black and white.

Seal, who later became head of psychiatry at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, said that the discovery of a physical cause and cure for syphilis early in the twentieth century gave momentum to the idea that "psychiatry would come into its own as a physical discipline, providing cures for organic mental states, and hopefully emptying half the mental asylums". It seemed increasingly that much mental illness might be related to physical causes, "especially with the further advent of Insulin and Electro-shock therapies". Although Seal found biological explanations helpful in some cases of mental illness, they did not explain everything. He gradually embraced elements of Freudian theory in his own practice. Nonetheless, he conjectured in the mid-1980s that new understandings of brain chemistry and nervous system function might lead him to return to the fold of biological psychiatrists.

Within psychiatry the recognition that unresolved tensions centring on religious beliefs continued to divide the profession prompted a number of interventions. In the US, the American Psychiatric Association established an *ad hoc* committee on Religion and Psychiatry in 1956, whose stated aim was to explore the conditions in which ethical values, faith and religion could contribute to mental health. In Melbourne the Department of Psychiatry at St Vincent's appointed the Reverend Professor William Meisner from Harvard University, who was both a priest and a psychiatrist interested in Freudian approaches, as its first visiting professor. During the 1980s the hospital also held an annual series of seminars on aspects of psychiatry and religion, attracting a broad audience with varied belief systems and viewpoints.

In this paper I have sought to show that in the 1950s the relationship between psychiatry, religion and science crystallised in new ways in Melbourne. There was a continuation of the move away from religiously-grounded explanations of mental illness. At the same time, a group of influential Catholic psychiatrists found it worthwhile to associate their approach with scientifically-derived biological explanations that were materialistic at heart, while not being anti-religious. In adopting this approach, these psychiatrists aligned themselves with a clearly progressive force in understanding human behaviour, both normal and abnormal, indeed a force capable of reducing some aspects of human unhappiness, including mental illness.

Part of *The Adventure of English*

JOE VASSALLO *was one of the thirteen members of Learningguild who enjoyed the weekend at Wandiligong in April 2013 that Jim Richardson described in our first issue for the year. Here Joe writes of what he finds particularly impressive in the episode we watched (the fourth) of Melvin Bragg's series* The Adventure of English *and the corresponding chapters (10-12) of Bragg's book of that name. Both the DVD and the book may be borrowed from John Howes.*

The episode and the tenth chapter begin memorably with Queen Elizabeth's speech, "in inspirational English", to her army at the port of Tilbury, near London, before the naval battle against the Spanish Armada in 1588. The victory of England's fleet had two consequences neatly described by Bragg: "As England imported a huge cargo of goods, English imported a huge cargo of vocabulary." He says that ten to twelve thousand new words entered English in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I.

Many of them came, with slight modifications, from nearby France, such as *crew*, *passport* and *explore*. Spain and/or Portugal gave us *banana* and *guitar* as well as *armada*, and Dutch *smuggle* and *landscape*.

Some words came into English because "English sailors encountered new foods and fruits and barrelled them up to try their luck in the riverside markets of England". Among Bragg's examples are

chocolate and *tomato*. Fifty other languages contributed words to English in these years as English ships sailed the world, "trading in goods, looting language".

Bragg goes on to mention words such as *portico* and *design* that came from Italian as English people with artistic tastes began to travel in Europe, especially Italy. Then he turns to the main source of expansion of vocabulary, the work of scholars, especially in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. "Thousands of Latin words came into the English vocabulary of educated people", often virtually unchanged. Greek too was drawn upon, sometimes via Latin, especially for medicine.

The eleventh chapter is called "Preparing the ground" – for Shakespeare, whose English is the subject of the twelfth. We are told of the first English dictionary (1604), which preceded the first ones for Italian and for French. The main themes of the eleventh chapter are the role of courtiers such as Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir Philip Sidney in developing English as a literary language; the difference, continuing to the present, between much written and much spoken English, the preference given by educated people (as by the BBC until recently) to the careful speech of those who lived, as George Puttenham put it in 1589, within sixty miles of London, later called the Received Pronunciation; and the complex mix of forms of English developed by the enormously popular troupes of actors.

Shakespeare, says Bragg, "had a vocabulary of at least twenty-one thousand different words". He continues: "Comparisons are entertaining: the King James Bible of 1611 used about ten thousand different words The average educated man today … has a working vocabulary of less than half that of Shakespeare." Over two thousand words are invented or first recorded by him. Among Bragg's examples are *obscene*, *barefaced* and *lack-lustre*. He helps us to imagine how the young Shakespeare's vocabulary grew.

"If the stature of a writer depends on his quotability then Shakespeare appears to be unmatchable." But Bragg also brings out the breadth and profundity of Shakespeare's thought.

To watch this episode and read these chapters has been for me an enriching experience.

Learningguild is an international educational and social movement. Membership is open to everyone who wants to go on learning and help others learn. We are based in Melbourne, Australia, and the subscription for Australian residents is $11 ($16.50 for a couple). Many Australian members add a donation, and thus we are able to welcome overseas members on the basis set out in the third paragraph on the next page.

The address of Learningguild's website, from the 1st of February 2014, is learningguild.org.au. Many past issues of this *Letter*, and supplements, are at 'Publications'. At 'Certificate' are the last five pairs of papers and related reports from the twice-yearly and repeatable examination for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, the text of the leaflet about that examination, and strong recommendations of it from Sir Keith Thomas of Oxford, Professor Peter Singer of Melbourne and Princeton, and the late Dr John Silber of Boston. Read at 'Tuition' of the materials and methods we use to help people develop their English and their powers of reasoning, and at 'Events and Meetings' of our Saturday Meetings and other gatherings.

We should welcome letters offered for publication, suggestions of books for review, and mentions (with brief explanation) of books, articles, films etc. that readers would like to recommend. These last would go into a section to be called "Worth attention".

A Letter to Students, 18 November 2013

Dear Syano and participants in the new branch of Learningguild at Bristol University,

Thank you, Syano, for your emails and in particular the one of the 18th of October in which you told me of discussions lasting about an hour and attendance of 7-10 at the early meetings of the branch. You add that Will gave a talk on definitions and Sarah on the problems of the American presidential debate system. That's certainly a good start.

I invite everyone who gives such a talk to send a text of it to me at Learningguild's email address (learningguild@gmail.com) so that my colleagues and I can consider publishing all or some of it. Moreover, contributions are also welcome on your own experience of university education so far (or of earlier education), or on other topics that interest you. Our range is wide, as is the acceptable length for articles. A good initial guide is 200-1500 words. I edit submissions (and my own writing!) with an eye to conciseness and clarity (see "Seven features of a good talk or paper" on our website [now learningguild.org.au]).

A small annual subscription is asked of Learningguild members within Australia (many add donations), but "Outside Australia, anyone who applies is welcome to become a member without needing to pay a subscription, either by the provision of hospitality to other members or by undertaking to send news, views or questions at least once a year to *Learningguild Letter*." Such a (moderate) requirement is needed if we are to be a genuinely international movement rather than a mere set of different groups with little interchange of materials or even experience or ideas. Thus I invite individual students (or teachers) to write to me, presumably in most cases giving that undertaking. I should be glad to hear of your courses and interests.

I offer just a few comments related to the subjects addressed by Will and by Sarah. I value J.L.Austin's remark "Definition, … explanatory definition, should stand high among our aims: it is not enough to show how clever we are by showing how obscure everything is." (That is the second-last sentence in his excellent methodological introduction to the paper "A Plea for Excuses".) One good introduction to philosophy itself is Plato's treatment of inadequate definitions, for example in the *Euthyphro* (where the key word '*hosion*' should be translated by 'righteous', not by 'pious' or 'holy'), the *Meno* (where the key word should be translated by 'excellence' rather than by 'virtue'), and the early part of the *Republic* (to 367).

The debates in the August-September campaign before the Australian federal election were not very good. I think there are three requirements if political debates are to be fruitful: (i) a skilled and impartial chairman, (ii) probing questions from experts in particular areas, (iii) opportunity for a wider audience to submit questions from which the chairman can choose. Such requirements are unlikely to be met unless there is a culture of fair-minded discussion (to which universities should be major contributors) rather than sloganizing, appeals to prejudice, and the polarization that has become endemic in so much American political discourse.

I hope that you will find (perhaps in the vacation?) many things in our past exam papers and reports, of which the last five pairs are available free at 'Certificate' on the website, and in *Learningguild Letter* and other items at 'Publications', that will prompt you to further

thought and discussion. One vital area for students is critical engagement with **both the theory and the practice of university education**, always with the constructive aim of making our own participation in it more fruitful for others and ourselves. With that in mind I reprint below Section 4 of this year's March examination. (Why the heading 'Factors and Arguments'?) Two enemies of good thinking are inconsistency and exaggeration, but the secondary English syllabus in Victoria no longer ensures training in the recognition of those and other faults in reasoning (are British syllabuses any better in that respect?). You might like to ask whether your education at Bristol does in fact have as a priority that you are, in Newman's phrase, "sure to learn one from another". How important is such learning? How could a Learningguild branch best foster it?

I look forward to hearing from you. You may like to consider my response, in the exam report, to this Section 4. Do tell me if you disagree with, or are puzzled by, anything there, or in this letter, or in any other Learningguild publication!

John Howes

4. FACTORS AND ARGUMENTS

Here are three passages, occurring in consecutive paragraphs, from the sixth of the discourses he gave in Ireland in 1852 which were subsequently included by John Henry Newman (1801-90) in the famous *The Idea of a University*. It is to be noted that, when he gave these lectures, the movement to admit women to universities had not begun in Britain or Ireland. Read the passages and meet the requirements set out below.

A) When a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant, as young men are, come together and freely mix with each other, they are sure to learn one from another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they gain for themselves new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day.

B) Here then is a real teaching, whatever be its standards and principles, true or false; and it at least tends towards cultivation of the intellect; it at least recognizes that knowledge is something more than a sort of passive reception of scraps and details; it is a something, and it does a something, which never will issue from the most strenuous efforts of a set of teachers, with no mutual sympathies and no intercommunion, of a set of examiners with no opinions that they dare profess, and with no common principles, who are teaching or questioning a set of youths who do not know them, and do not know each other, on a large number of subjects, different in kind, and connected by no wide philosophy, three times a week, or three times a year, in chill lecture rooms or on a pompous anniversary.

C) Few indeed there are who can dispense with the stimulus and support of instructors, or will do anything at all if left to themselves. And fewer still (though such great minds are to be found), who will not, from such unassisted attempts, contract a self-reliance and a self-esteem, which are not only moral evils, but serious hindrances to the attainment of truth.

i) Explain why it might be held that C is inconsistent with A and B, and why you would agree or disagree that it is.

ii) "Newman's descriptions are unfairly loaded, in favour of one aspect of the residential Oxford he had known and against what he considers to be defective." Explain why you do or do not altogether agree with that objection. (Write about 100-150 words, with reference to some of those descriptions.)

iii) "In more moderate but still vivid prose, we can and should draw on the concerns Newman expresses here to construct a (quite complex) ideal of what a good education requires." If you don't agree, explain why; if you do, make a start at presenting such an ideal. (Write about 200 words.)

Bristol is in the west of England.

My letter of 30 December 2013 to James Anthony, the Director, and others at Holy Mother School, Bharatpur, India, is to appear in the first issue of L'g L *for 2014. JH*